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When the Business Is Personal

A coordinated approach to business owner planning



For small business owners, business planning is personal planning

For small business owners (SBOs), their business is often much more than a source of income. It can be the engine behind retirement goals, the safety net for family members, the foundation for their children's future, and a legacy to pass on. That puts real weight on the business itself, and on the person behind it.

When so many business and personal goals and aspirations are at stake, planning in isolation can make it harder to see how each decision shapes the others.

The challenge is that business and personal goals do not sit neatly in separate boxes. Cash flow can affect household financial stability. Business value can shape retirement options. Succession planning can influence whether the owner's work becomes future income, family wealth, or a legacy. For many owners, those connections are part of everyday reality. But connecting those dots is often where the challenge begins.

Small business owners tie personal goals to business success

52% Create generational wealth

39% Retire early

26% Fund a child's education



While the business can be what keeps the lights on today, it's also where owners place their hopes for tomorrow and beyond.

The planning gap is not about more action — it is about better coordination

SBOs are used to solving problems and taking action. That independence is often what drives them to be entrepreneurs in the first place. **Only 38% of SBOs prefer working with professionals when researching and purchasing financial products, while more than a quarter prefer to complete those tasks entirely on their own.**

But as the business grows, carrying every planning responsibility can become harder to sustain, leading to missed opportunities and unintended risks.

Cash flow, benefits, company culture, business growth, taxes, and protection planning all start to overlap. And the impact reaches beyond the balance sheet, affecting employees, partners, customers, family members, the owner's household, and, of course, the owner.

88% of SBOs use at least one resource for financial planning or financial/ insurance decisions.

Owners who seek professional guidance often receive it from multiple sources. One financial advisor may help with retirement planning, another with taxes, and a third with employee benefits or insurance. Each relationship can add value, but those conversations often happen independently of one another.

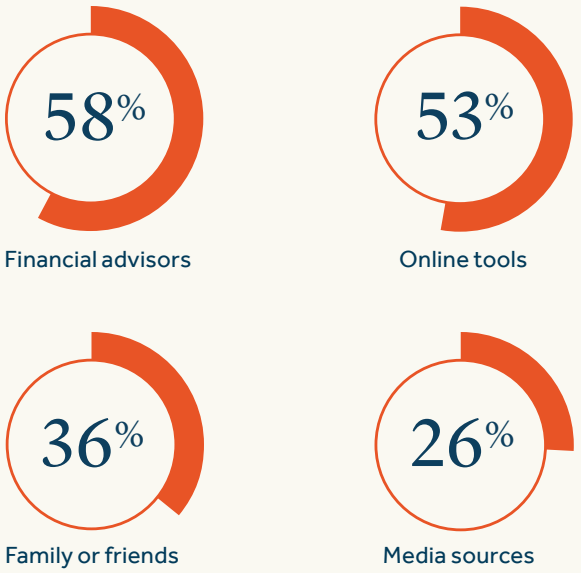
When that guidance is provided separately, the owner is left responsible for coordinating all the moving parts, while also running the business day to day. For some, managing it all can feel like a heavy burden:

1 in 5 SBOs say they avoid dealing with finances because it overwhelms them.

Over time, SBOs can put many valuable planning pieces in place. But when there is little time to review and coordinate them, those pieces can become outdated or disconnected.

The difference may not be having more resources, but having those resources work together.

SBOs use varied resources to make financial decisions



That matters because the gaps often show up in crucial areas:

- **Only 30%** of SBOs work with a financial advisor for generational wealth planning.
- **Just 34%** have a succession plan.
- **Only 19%** have disability buyout coverage.

Running a business means balancing today's needs with plans for tomorrow. With so much requiring attention now, it can be difficult to make time for priorities that may feel farther away. Succession planning, for example, may not be addressed until a transition starts feeling immediate.

A more coordinated approach can help owners make room for important long-term priorities by bringing business decisions, personal goals, and professional guidance into the same picture.

Bringing planning pieces into one coordinated strategy

If coordination is the challenge, the next step is to understand what coordinated planning looks like in practice.

Rather than treating planning as a series of separate conversations, holistic planning brings business decisions, personal goals, and professional guidance together into one coordinated process that is designed to evolve alongside the business and the owner's life. It can help connect business decisions with household financial confidence, retirement readiness, employee commitments, and future transition options.

Among business owners who use professionals for holistic financial planning, 61% report high financial health and 80% report confidence in their business.

In WestPac's 4D Planning™ framework, the **owner's role shifts from coordinating everyone themselves to making informed decisions with a coordinated team.**

Instead of asking the owner to interpret and align separate recommendations, the process brings professionals and their experience together so the owner can see how each decision fits into the whole plan.

When asked about the benefits of financial guidance, business owners most often cite better retirement readiness, greater peace of mind, and more confidence in financial decision-making.

Importantly, not every owner needs the same strategy. What matters is that connected decisions are considered together and reviewed as the business and the owner's needs change.

Whole-owner planning works best when it is coordinated by design, because business, household, employees, retirement, protection, and legacy goals are already connected in the owner's life.

2D Planning	3D Planning	4D Planning
The owner manages planning and decision-making on their own, often addressing needs as they arise.	Multiple professionals provide specialized guidance, while the owner remains responsible for connecting recommendations and coordinating decisions.	Planning decisions are coordinated, implemented, and adjusted as the business evolves.



Putting 4D Planning into practice

The following case studies show how coordinated planning can uncover opportunities that may be missed when legal, tax, retirement, ownership, and business decisions are addressed in isolation. Each case study builds on the same business owner profile.[1]

Business owner profile

- Operating in the health care industry.
- $2.9 million in taxable income.
- Multiple business activities and income streams housed within one entity.
- A traditional retirement plan used primarily as an employee benefit.
- No plan for a future business transition.

Case Study #1: Creating flexibility through coordinated business structure

Starting point

A separate equipment company existed but had not been fully integrated into the broader business structure, limiting planning flexibility and tax efficiency as the business grew.

3D Planning

The equipment company was formalized, agreements were established, and the operating company began leasing equipment from it.

Impact: **$27,000 in annual tax savings** and improved separation of assets and operating risk.

4D Planning

Planning expanded beyond entity structure to evaluate ownership design. By incorporating family ownership and potential trust planning into the strategy, the owner gained more flexibility around income allocation and long-term planning.

Impact: An increase from **$27,000 to $65,400 in annual tax savings**.



Final outcome:

2.4x the annual tax savings.

$27,000 → $65,400

Key takeaway:

Creating a separate entity generated value. However, coordinating business structure, tax strategy, and ownership design increased that value significantly.

Case Study #2: Turning retirement planning into a wealth strategy

Starting point

The retirement plan functioned primarily as an employee benefit. Contribution limits restricted how much the owner could contribute toward personal retirement goals.

3D Planning

Retirement planning was redesigned to layer multiple retirement vehicles, transforming the plan from a basic employee benefit into a broader business and tax planning strategy.

4D Planning

Rather than viewing retirement planning as a standalone decision, the owner aligned retirement plan design with ownership structure, tax strategy, and broader wealth-building goals.

Impact: Owner contributions increased from **$32,000 to $370,000,** generating $180,000 in annual tax savings.

Final outcome:

A broader strategy for building wealth.

$32,000 → $370,000

$180,000 in annual tax savings.

Key takeaway:

Coordinating retirement planning with broader business objectives unlocked substantially greater long-term value.

Case Study #3: Preserving more business value at exit

Starting point

A future business transition was evaluated using a traditional business sale structure. After projected taxes, debt obligations, and transaction costs, the owner could retain only half of the business's value.

3D Planning

Planning explored separating operations, equipment assets, and intellectual property into distinct entities years before a potential sale. This created greater flexibility in how the business could be structured, sold, and taxed.

Impact: The revised structure **increased projected retained value by $5.1 million.**

4D Planning

Conversations expanded beyond entity structure to include family and trust ownership as part of the strategy. Coordinating those decisions created additional flexibility in how business value could be transferred and retained.

Impact: Coordinated planning **increased projected retained value by approximately $7 million** compared with the traditional structure.

Same $30 million business. Different outcomes.



Final outcome:

$7 million more retained value at exit.

$14.9 million → $21.9 million

Key takeaway:

Preparing for an exit generated value. However, coordinating planning can unlock substantially more value at transition.

Case Study #4: Creating choices before exit

Starting point

The owner had not yet determined how the business would transition. The company could be sold to a third party, transferred to a family member, or wound down entirely. When a transition still feels far away, it can be difficult to give each possible path the attention it deserves.

3D Planning

Planning explored a business structure that could support several potential transition paths. Rather than preparing for a single outcome, the owner established a structure capable of supporting multiple future scenarios.

Impact: The owner gained greater flexibility around how the business could be structured, transferred, and taxed.

4D Planning

The conversation expanded beyond business structure to consider after-tax outcomes and future flexibility. Because ownership planning, entity structure, and long-term goals had been aligned in advance, the owner could compare potential opportunities without being locked into a single transition path.

Impact: In the projected scenario, the owner's after-tax proceeds were approximately **$3.5 million higher** than under the traditional sale structure, even assuming a **$4.5 million lower purchase price**.

Final outcome:

Greater negotiation flexibility.

$3.5 million more retained value, even after a **$4.5 million** price concession.

Key takeaway:

Coordinated planning cannot predict the future, but it can preserve flexibility by giving owners more options when transition opportunities arise.



Could your planning be better connected? A 4D Planning checklist.

Check one answer for each question, then count your "No" responses below.	Yes	No
Do you have a written plan that connects your business, retirement, family, and future transition goals?	☐	☐
Have your CPA, attorney, financial advisor, and other key advisors met together to coordinate your strategy?	☐	☐
Do you know how much you could retain after taxes, debt, and transaction costs if you sold your business today?	☐	☐
Is your retirement plan designed to support both employee benefits and your long-term wealth-building goals?	☐	☐
Have you reviewed your business structure within the last five years to see whether it still supports your tax, ownership, and growth objectives?	☐	☐
Do you have a documented plan in place for an unexpected exit, disability, retirement, or sale?	☐	☐
Are your legal, tax, insurance, retirement, and ownership decisions reviewed together when major business changes occur?	☐	☐
If a major opportunity or life change occurred tomorrow, would you feel confident that your current structure could support the outcome you want?	☐	☐

What your score may tell you

0–2 "No" answers

Many parts of your planning may already be working together. Regular reviews can help keep them aligned as your business evolves.

3–5 "No" answers

You may have many of the right planning pieces in place, with opportunities to better connect business, tax, retirement, protection, and transition planning.

6+ "No" answers

Some planning decisions may be happening separately. Bringing them together could help you identify gaps, understand your choices, and move forward with clarity.

Methodology

The Guardian 15th Annual Workplace Benefits Study, 2026.

Research methodology and sample characteristics:

- The study was fielded in January and February of 2026 and includes a survey among 2,000 working Americans age 22 or older who work full time or part time for a company with at least five employees. This year's survey also included a sample of 278 small business owners with 1 to 49 employees.
- The survey sample is nationally representative of US workers at companies of at least five employees. The margin of error is +/- 2.2% at the 95% confidence level.

WestPac Wealth Partners 4D Planning™ Process

The 4D Planning process is a proprietary planning model developed by WestPac Wealth Partners, a member of the Guardian network.

For more information on the 4D Planning process and how it could help your business, speak with your WestPac advisor or visit http://www.westpacwealth.com/4d-planning.

References

1 All scenarios mentioned herein are solely for educational purposes. The information presented should not be used as the basis for any specific investment advice.

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